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S E C R E T STATE 206414

EXDIS MILITARY ADDEE HANDLE AS SPECAT EXCLUSIVE

FOLLOWING REPEAT BANGKOK 18234 DTG 291213Z AUG ACTION SECSTATE

QUOTE

S E C R E T BANGKOK 18234

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, TH, MARR

SUBJ: FORCE REDUCTIONS IN THAILAND

REF: STATE 193427

1. PARAGRAPH 5 OF REFTEL REQUESTED A CLOSER READING ON THE PRESSURES ON THE U.S. ARMED FORCES PRESENCE IN THAILAND. HERE ARE OUR REPLIES TO THE QUESTIONS WHICH WERE POSED.

2. WHAT FORMS ARE NEW PRESSURES LIKELY TO TAKE, IS THERE EVIDENCE THAT SUCH PRESSURES ARE FORMING, AND HOW IS THE KHUKRIT GOVERNMENT LIKELY TO TRY TO HANDLE THESE PRESSURES?

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ANSWER: OUR CONCERN REGARDING POSSIBLE OR EVEN PROBABLE PRESSURES HAS BEEN BASED ON OUR APPREHENSION THAT POLITICALLY VOLATILE ELEMENTS IN THAI SOCIETY, AND EVEN CERTAIN ELEMENTS IN THE RTG, WOULD LAUNCH A PRESS CAMPAIGN AND DEMONSTRATIONS IF THE NOTION GOT AROUND THAT THE U.S. WAS STALLING ON ITS FORCE RE-DEPLOYMENT FROM THAILAND AND APPEARED TO WISH TO REMAIN NOTWITHSTANDING THE MARCH DEADLINE. IN OUR VIEW SUCH PRESSURES WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN LIMITED TO THE ACTIONS OF STUDENT AND OTHER LEFT WING GROUPS AS ANY ACTIONS TAKEN TO ASSURE THE RAPIDITY OF THE U.S. WITHDRAWAL WOULD STRIKE A RESPONSIVE NATIONALISTIC CORD IN MANY SEGMENTS OF THAI SOCIETY. THOUGHTFUL AI WHOSE VIEWS SPAN THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM ARE MINDFUL OF THE FACT THAT THE CESSATION OF U.S. AIR ACTIVITY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA IN AUGUST 1973 AND OUR FAILURE TO USE AMERICAN AIRCRAFT IN SUPPORT OF PHNOM PENH AND SAIGON MAKE A CONTINUED PRESENCE OF U.S. COMBAT AIRCRAFT HERE ANACHRONISTIC. AS HAS BEEN DEMONSTRATED BY OUR RECENT CONVERSATIONS WITH THE PRIME MINISTER AND FOREIGN MINISTER, THERE IS VERY CONSIDERABLE SUPPORT FOR A CONTINUING LONG-RANGE U.S. MILITARY PRESENCE HERE BUT WE BELIEVE THAT THE VIEW IS WIDELY HELD THAT U.S. COMBAT ELEMENTS SHOULD BE WITHDRAWN. IN THIS CONTEXT, WE DOUBT VERY MUCH THAT THE KHUKRIT GOVERNMENT WOULD DO OTHER THAN ASSOCIATE ITSELF WITH THESE PRESSURES.

3. WHY ARE THE THAI SEEMINGLY RELUCTANT TO GIVE US THEIR VIEWS ON HOW U.S. FORCES IN THAILAND RELATE TO MUTUAL THAI AND U.S. SECURITY INTERESTS?

ANSWER: WE BELIEVE THAT THE THAI HERETOFORE HAVE BEEN RELUCTANT TO GIVE US THEIR VIEWS WITH REGARD TO U.S. FORCES IN THAILAND WHILE THEY HAVE BEEN GROING FOR NEW RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE COMMUNIST POWERS IN THE AREA. SOME THAI LEADERS, NOTABLY FOREIGN MINISTER CHATCHAI, HAVE, WE BELIEVE, HARBORED A HOPE THAT SWEET REASONABLENESS WOULD BE DEMONSTRATED BY HANOI AND VIENTIANE. AS THE DEPARTMENT IS AWARE,

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RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA HAVE CAUSED THE RTG TO VIEW THE POSSIBILITY OF IMPROVED RELATIONS WITH HANOI AND VIENTIANE WITH FAR GREATER SKEPTICISM THAN THEY DID IN THE IMMEDIATE AFTERMATH OF THE FALL OF CAMBODIA AND SOUTH VIETNAM.

4. ALTHOUGH WE MUST PLAN IN TERMS OF THE CONTINGENCY THAT THE THAI GOVERNMENT MIGHT IN THE END STICK TO

THE MARCH DEADLINE, WHY SHOULD WE REGARD THIS DEADLINE AS A VIRTUAL CERTAINTY?

ANSWER: AS REPORTED IN BANGKOK 18137 ON THE AMBASSADOR'S TALK WITH THE PRIME MINISTER, WE ARE MINDFUL OF THE INDICATIONS THAT KHUKRIT DID NOT WANT TO EXCLUDE THE OPTION OF A SUBSTANTIAL U.S. PRESENCE. WE ARE INCLINED TO BELIEVE THAT KHUKRIT TO A CERTAIN DEGREE TAILORED HIS REMARKS TO HIS AUDIENCE AND THAT THE POSITION THAT HE AND FOREIGN MINISTER CHATCHAI HAVE TAKEN WITH US IS AN HONEST STATEMENT OF RTG POLICY. IT DOES NOT STRIKE US AS UNUSUAL THAT IN CONVERSATIONS WITH CERTAIN INDIVIDUALS, KHUKRIT MAY EXPRESS HIS WILLINGNESS TO HAVE A CONSIDERABLE U.S. PRESENCE MAINTAINED. STATEMENTS OF THIS NATURE SHOULD BE BALANCED AGAINST OTHER COMMENTS HE HAS MADE TO OTHER AUDIENCES THAT THE U.S. SHOULD WITHDRAW ITS FORCES AND CLOSE ITS BASES BY MARCH. IN THE LIGHT OF OUR RECENT TALKS WITH KHUKRIT AND CHATCHAI, IT APPEARS CLEAR THAT THE MARCH DEADLINE NOW APPLIES ONLY TO COMBAT ELEMENTS AND THAT ANY RESIDUAL U.S. PRESENCE ON ONE OR MORE BASES MUST BE CLEARLY TAILORED TO MEET THE DOMESTIC POLITICAL REQUIREMENTS OF THE RTG. THE STATEMENTS MADE BY CHATCHAI AND THE PRIME MINISTER TO THE PRESS FOLLOWING THEIR MEETING WITH THE AMBASSADOR REITERATED THE THAI POSITION WITH REGARD TO THE WITHDRAWAL OF COMBAT ELEMENTS BY MARCH.

5. WHY DOES KHUKRIT APPARENTLY WANT TO REDUCE THE ROLE OF CHATCHAI AND HIS MINISTRY IN THE NEGOTIATION OF OUR FORCE REDUCTIONS?

ANSWER: AS HAS BEEN REPORTED IN VARIOUS MES-
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SAGES, WE BELIEVE THAT THE PRIME MINISTER HAS BEEN MINDFUL OF CHATCHAI'S EAGERNESS TO PLACATE THE COMMUNIST POWERS AND WE BELIEVE HE MINIMIZED CHATCHAI'S ROLE AND THAT OF THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS UNTIL AN OFFICIAL RTG POSITION ON THE FUNDAMENTAL QUESTION OF THE FUTURE U.S. RELATIONSHIP COULD BE REACHED. NOW THAT KHUKRIT AND HIS GOVERNMENT HAVE SETTLED ON A POLICY WHICH ACCEPTS A NON-COMBAT U.S. MILITARY PRESENCE, EFFORTS TO CIRCUMVENT THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS SHOULD NO LONGER BE NECESSARY.

6. WHY SHOULD WE HANDLE FURTHER U.S. FORCE REDUCTIONS IN TERMS OF BASE CLOSURES, RATHER THAN IN TERMS OF FORCE LEVELS OR TYPES OF UNITS, OR A BALANCED COMBINATION OF BOTH?

ANSWER: THE REDUCTION OF THE U.S. PRESENCE ON THE BASIS OF FORCE LEVELS DOES NOT HAVE THE PSYCHOLOGICAL AND POLITICAL IMPACT WHICH THE RTG NEEDS AS IT MOVES TOWARD A MORE BALANCED POSTURE VIS-A-VIS ITS NEIGHBORS. THE BARRAGE OF HOSTILE COMMENT DIRECTED AT THAILAND BY RADIO HANOI, RADIO PATHET LAO AND THE CHINESE-RUN VOICE OF THE PEOPLE OF THAILAND WHICH THE RTG WISHES TO DEFUSE IS FOCUSED ON BASES--. FURTHERMORE, THAI MILITARY AND CIVILIAN OFFICIALS FIND IT HARD TO UNDERSTAND WHY THE U.S. WOULD WISH TO KEEP BASES OPEN AND OCCUPIED BY A MINIMAL RESIDUAL MILITARY PRESENCE GIVEN THE CONGRESSIONAL STRICTURES AGAINST THE USE OF AMERICAN AIR POWER IN THIS THEATER. IT SEEMS LOGICAL TO THEM THAT THE U.S. CONSOLIDATE ITS PRESENCE IN THE BASES IT STILL OCCUPIES RATHER THAN DESIRING TO SCATTER ITS PERSONNEL IN SEVERAL BASES FOR REASONS WHICH ARE UNCLEAR.

7. WE RECOGNIZE THAT OUR RECENT TALKS HERE HAVE TO A CERTAIN EXTENT ANSWERED THE FOREGOING QUESTIONS, BUT TRUST THESE COMMENTS WILL BE HELPFUL. THE MISSION IS PREPARING A SERIES OF RECOMMENDATIONS WITH REGARD TO OUR PRESENCE OVER THE LONG TERM IN THE LIGHT OF POLICY ENUNCIATED BY KHUKRIT AND CHATCHAI. AS THE DEPARTMENT IS AWARE, WE HAVE BEEN CONFIDENT FOR SOME
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TIME THAT A RESIDUAL U.S. MILITARY PRESENCE HERE COULD BE ARRANGED AND THAT THE RTG'S REPEATED PUBLIC PRO- NOUNCEMENTS OF ITS REQUIREMENT THAT ALL U.S. FORCES LEAVE BY MARCH 1976 WERE A RESPONSE TO WHAT THAILAND CONSIDERS AS AN INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL IMPERATIVE BUT THAT CONCURRENTLY THE RTG WOULD BE WILLING TO HAVE THE U.S. MAINTAIN THOSE FACILITIES WHICH ARE IN THE INTEREST OF BOTH COUNTRIES AND WHICH CANNOT BE POR- TRAYED AS POSING A THREAT TO THE COMMUNIST COUNTRIES WITH WHICH THAILAND CONTINUES TO HOPE TO ACHIEVE SOME KIND OF MODUS VIVENDI.
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